

Remarks by President Bush to the U.S. University Presidents Summit on International Education

U.S. Department of State
Washington, D.C.

3:50 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all. Madam Secretary, it's your building, you can give my speech, if you want to. (Laughter.)

But first, our nation sends our deepest sympathies to Ariel Sharon. He lies immobilized in an Israeli hospital. We pray for his recovery. He's a good man, a strong man, a man who cared deeply about the security of the Israeli people and a man who had a vision for peace. May God bless him.

Madam Secretary, thanks for having me. I'm here to let the good folks know here how strongly I support the national security language initiative. I've had a little problem with the language in the past, so -- (laughter.) If you've got room in the initiative for me, let me know. (Laughter.) Condi said, come on by, we've got a bunch of university presidents here. And I said, great, just so long as we don't have to compare transcripts. (Laughter.) She's the Ph.D., I'm the President. (Laughter and applause.)

She's a heck of a Secretary of State, though. And Don Rumsfeld is a heck of a Secretary of the Defense, and I want to thank you both for joining together on this initiative. It's interesting, isn't it, that the State Department and the Defense Department are sponsoring a language initiative. It says something about the world we live in. I felt certain that the Secretary of Education would be here. After all, we're talking about education. And I want to thank you for being here, Margaret. But I also find it's interesting you're sitting next to John Negroponte, who is the Director of National Intelligence.

In other words, this initiative is a broad-gauged initiative that deals with the defense of the country, the diplomacy of the country, the intelligence to defend our country, and the education of our people. And it's an important initiative, and I'm going to tell you why in a second. But thank you for joining your -- together to make this happen.

I want to thank Deputy Secretary of State Bob Zoellick, and I want to thank the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Lugar from Indiana. Senator Pat Roberts from Kansas is with us. I think you'll find this interesting: He has promoted the advanced study of foreign languages through the Pat Roberts Intelligence Scholars Program. Thanks for doing that.

And I want to thank Congressman Rush Holt for being here, as well. Thank you for coming, Rush. Thanks for taking time.

I appreciate all the Ambassadors who are here. I'm scanning the room. I see a few familiar faces, and thanks for serving. What the heck are you doing here? Like, you're supposed to be -- (laughter.) The deal was overseas. (Laughter.)

We're living in extraordinary times. I wish I could report to you the war on terror was over. It's not. There is still an enemy that lurks, that wants to hurt us. I hate to report that to the American people, but my duty is to lay it out as plainly as I possibly can. And that's the truth.

And so the fundamental question is, how do we win? What do we do? Well, in the short-term, our strategy is to find them and bring them to justice before they hurt us. In other words, we've got to stay on the offense. We've got to be unyielding and never give them a, you know, a breath of fresh air, never give them a hope that they can succeed. It's the only way to do it. We must defeat them in foreign battlefields so they don't strike us here at home.

And that's one of the reasons why the Secretary of Defense is here. He wants his young soldiers who are the front lines of finding these killers to be able to speak their language and be able to listen to the people in the communities in which they live. That makes sense, doesn't it, to have a language-proficient military -- to have people that go into the far reaches of this world and be able to communicate in the villages and towns and rural areas and urban centers, to protect the American people.

We need intelligence officers who, when somebody says something in Arabic or Farsi or Urdu knows what they're talking about. That's what we need. We need diplomats -- when we send them out to help us convince governments that we've got to join together and fight these terrorists who want to destroy life and promote an ideology that is so backwards it's hard to believe. These diplomats need to speak that language.

So our short-term strategy is to stay on the offense, and we've got to give our troops, our intelligence officers, our diplomats all the tools necessary to succeed. That's what people in this country expect of our government. They expect us to be wise about how we use our resources, and a good use of resources is to promote this language initiative in K through 12, in our universities. And a good use of resources is to encourage foreign language speakers from important regions of the world to come here and teach us how to speak their language.

You're going to hear a lot about the specifics of the program. What I'm trying to suggest to you that this program is a part of a strategic goal, and that is to protect this country in the short-term and protect it in the long-term by spreading freedom. We're facing an ideological struggle, and we're going to win. Our ideology is a heck of a lot more hopeful than theirs.

You can't have an ideology that works if you say to half the population in a part of the world, you have no rights. You can't say to a group of people, my ideology is better than freedom, and if you speak out you're going to get -- you'll be tortured.

You see, freedom is the ideology that wins. We got to have confidence in that as we go out. But you can't win in the long run for democracy unless you've got the capacity to help spread democracy. You see, we got to convince people of the benefits of a free society. I believe everybody desires to be free. But I also know people need to be convincing -- convinced -- I told you I needed to go to language school. (Laughter.) And you can't convince people unless you can talk to them. And I'm not talking to them right now directly; I'm talking through an interpreter on some of these Arabic TV stations.

But we need people in America who can go and say to people, living in freedom is not the American way of life, it is a universal way of life. We're not saying your democracy has to be like yours. We're just saying give your people a chance to live in a free society; give women a chance to live freely; give young girls a chance to be educated and realize their full potential.

And the best way to do that is to have those of us who understand freedom be able to communicate in the language of the people we're trying to help. In order to convince people we care about them, we've got to understand their culture and show them we care about their culture. When somebody comes to me and speaks Texan, I know they appreciate the Texas culture. (Laughter.) I mean, somebody takes time to figure out how to speak Arabic, it means they're interested in somebody else's culture. Learning a language -- somebody else's language is a kind gesture. It's a gesture of interest. It really is a fundamental way to reach out to somebody and say, I care about you. I want you to know that I'm interested in not only how you talk but how you live.

In order for this country to be able to convince others, people have got to be able to see our true worth in our heart. And when Americans learn to speak a language, learn to speak Arabic, those in the Arabic region will say, gosh, America is interested in us. They care enough to learn how we speak.

One of the great programs we've got here in America in terms of people understanding how we think and how we act is these scholarships we provide to our universities. I know this isn't the topic the Secretary assigned me to talk about, but it's one I'm going to talk about anyway. We want young kids from around the world coming to our universities. It's in our national interest that we solve visa issues and make sure that -- (applause.) We have been calibrating the proper balance after September the 11th, and I fully understand some of your frustrations, particularly when you say the balance wasn't actually calibrated well. But we're

going to get it right, because the more youngsters who come to America to get educated, the more likely it is people in the world will understand the true nature of America.

You can't figure out America when you're looking on some of these TV stations -- you just can't -- particularly given the message that they spread. Arabic TV does not do our country justice. They put out some kind -- sometimes put out propaganda that just is -- just isn't right, it isn't fair, and it doesn't give people the impression of what we're about. You bring somebody here to college, it doesn't matter what's on TV, they see firsthand the compassion of the United States of America. They get to see firsthand that we don't discriminate based upon religion. They get to see firsthand the multicultural society in which we live, all united under the fabric of freedom. That's what they get to see.

And so I'm working with Condi, and she's working with others, to work with you, to make sure these youngsters are able to come to our universities. I'll tell you what's really neat, is to sit down with leaders from around the world, welcome them in the Oval Office or go to their office, they say, you know, Mr. President, I went to Texas A&M, or I went to Stanford -- like President Toledo of Peru. I mean, it is -- it makes it so much easier to conduct foreign policy and diplomacy when you've got that common ground of being able to talk about a university experience here in the United States. It makes it so much easier to be able to advance the interests of this country when you're dealing with a leader who doesn't have a preconceived notion about what America is all about, because he spent time studying here in the United States.

We're going to teach our kids how to speak important languages. We'll welcome teachers here to help teach our kids how to speak languages. But we're also going to advance America's interests around the world and defeat this notion about our -- you know, our bullying concept of freedom by letting people see what we're about. Let them see firsthand the decency of this country.

And so, Madam Secretary, in front of these presidents, you and I vow that we'll find that proper balance between security and letting people come to our universities for the good of this country.

I -- there is no doubt in my mind we will win the war on terror. There's no doubt in my mind that Afghanistan will remain a democracy and serve as an incredible example. For those of you in education, you might remember this was a country that refused to educate young girls. And now, young girls in most of Afghanistan are going to school.

Iraq -- we'll succeed in Iraq. It's tough. And the reason it's tough is because a handful of killers wants to stop the advance of freedom for a reason. Democracy in the heart of the Middle East is a major defeat to their ideology and their ambitions.

And it's hard work. What you're seeing on your TV screen is hard work. But we've done, as Condi said, hard work before. We have defeated fascism in the past. We defeated communism in the past. And we will defeat this ideology of hatred. But it's going to take all the tools at our disposal.

One of the stories I like to share with people is this. I -- one of my best buddies in international politics is Prime Minister Koizumi of Japan. He's an interesting person. Elvis was his favorite singer, for example. (Laughter.)

Every time I meet with him, it strikes me as an amazing fact of history that Number 41, President 41, at age 18 fought the Japanese, and 43, his son, is sitting down with the Prime Minister working on keeping the peace. It's amazing to me. And something happened between 41 going into combat and 43 talking to the Prime Minister whether it be about troops in Iraq to help this young democracy flourish in the heart of the Middle East, or whether it be dealing with the leader of North Korea who is starving his people to death, and how do we solve that? What do we do about it?

And what happened was that the Japanese adopted a Japanese-style democracy. It wasn't an American-style democracy; it was Japanese-style democracy. And that society, that form of government was able to convert an enemy to an ally. And that's what's happening. I live it when I talk to the Prime Minister. I see it firsthand. It's a real part of my family's life.

Someday, an American President is going to sit down and thank this generation for having the willpower and the determination to see to it that democracy has a chance to flourish in a part of the world that is desperate for democracy. Someday somebody is going to say -- (applause) -- somebody someday will say we're able to more likely keep the peace because this generation of Americans had confidence in our capacity to work with others to spread freedom.

And that's what we're facing today, and the stakes are high. It's an exciting time to be here in Washington, D.C. It's a fantastic opportunity to serve our country. And I want to thank those of you who are serving it in government. And I want to thank those of you who serve it through higher education. There's no greater gift to give a child than the chance to succeed and realize his or her dreams. And you're doing that.

Appreciate you giving me a chance to come by and tell you what's on my mind. My God bless our country. (Applause.)

END 4:00 P.M. EST